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THE GAZA CRISIS: NO WAY OUT?  
POLICY OPTIONS AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: Well, good afternoon, everyone. I'm Tamara Wittes. I am the director of the Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, and I'd like to thank you all for joining us, particularly those of you who have proved willing to stand in the back. And I'm glad you're all here.

We are gathering on a day that perhaps offers the first small glimmer of hope that the current round of violence might be ending after several pretty horrible weeks, and there are a lot of factors I think that one could point to in explaining how we got here, why this conflict -- this round of violent conflict erupted when it did. There are narrow proximate causes. There are broader structural causes. But underlying all of these is an unresolved conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. And that means that however this round ends, there are some larger questions we need to delve into about where things go from here.

There are questions, I think, for an Israeli government that seemed earlier this summer to be questioning or maybe even setting aside its previously declared support for a two-state solution. There's the question for Israel of what kind of future it wants for its people and its relationship with its Palestinian neighbors. For Palestinians and for the Palestinian leadership, there are questions as well. The Palestinian leadership that was shunted aside as this violent conflict began that's struggling now to make itself central to the cease fire agreement. There's the question of what alternatives it can offer to Hamas's violence, alternatives that might win back the support of a victimized and increasingly frustrated Palestinian public.

There are questions as well for governments in the region, where divisions within the Arab world helped contribute to the confrontation and to the delay in achieving a cease fire, so they face the question of whether resolving the Palestinian

issue is a real priority, or whether this longstanding conflict has now become just another arena for proxy conflict between contending regional actors.

And I think there are questions here for the United States as well. It's long been the essential mediator in Israeli-Arab affairs, but it's seen its diplomacy roundly criticized in this instance, and its advice to its close partner and ally, Israel, met with what the New York Times termed this morning "dismissal." So there's the question of whether bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations mediated by the United States and driving towards a two-state solution, whether that is still the best means to resolve this longstanding and terrible conflict.

Now, those of you who have heard me speak on this topic before know that I've felt for a long time that the primary obstacles to a peace agreement lie in the domestic politics of the two sides, and I think there's no doubt that where we sit today after four weeks of horrific violence, there's been a "rally around the flag" effect on both sides, and to some extent we've seen harder line voices strengthened over this period. But I would see that as a temporary development, and the question is what happens after that fades?

So we're at a moment where I think we can hope that each of the parties involved in this conflict and interested in this conflict will engage in some self-criticism and some internal reflection.

And as I was preparing for our event today, I thought that this is a fitting day to talk about that, because today on the Jewish calendar is Tisha B'Av. It's the day in which Jews mark the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and it's the day they read the Book of Lamentations, which is a sad and self-critical, but ultimately somewhat hopeful reflection on the destruction of the temple.

So perhaps with that as a bit of a backdrop, we can delve into some of

these big questions that need to be answered about where we go from here, questions that we hope leaders on all sides will be asking themselves.

And I am really delighted to be joined by three terrific colleagues from the Foreign Policy Program here at Brookings to be part of this conversation. Of course, Ambassador Martin Indyk, vice president for Foreign Policy at Brookings. And we're very glad to have you back on our stage, Martin.

MR. INDYK: Glad to be back.

MS. WITTES: Khaled Elgindy, my colleague and a fellow in the Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, and Natan Sachs, another fantastic fellow and colleague in the Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings. And all of these gentlemen have been doing some great work throughout the last month, talking to the media, writing very perceptive analyses in foreign affairs, foreign policy, on our website, helping us all understand this crisis as it unfolded.

So thanks to all of you for being here.

And let me begin, if I may, with a look at the United States. Martin, going back to this article in the New York Times this morning, saying that Israel dismissed American diplomacy during the conflict and suggesting that U.S.-Israel relations are under unprecedented strain. Now, the article points out, too, to be fair, that there have been previous instances of significant tension between Israeli prime ministers and U.S. presidents of both parties.

How does this current period rank? Is this truly an unprecedented period of strain? And what does it mean for the role of the U.S. going forward?

MR. INDYK: Well, thank you, Tamara, and thank you all very much for coming. I'm sorry that we're on in the Brookings Faulk Auditorium, but they're renovating it at the moment so you'll have a better user experience a month from now. So we'll look

forward to bringing you back home.

I'm very happy to be back home, and grateful for the opportunity to speak today, although the circumstances couldn't be more horrific and more depressing after a 12-month intensive effort by the United States secretary of state, which I was involved in, of course, to try to get peace between Israelis and Palestinians to see the whole thing blow up yet again in another found of chronic and horrific violence is profoundly depressing. And it's precisely depressing because the secretary of state, John Kerry, was out there warning time and time again that the status quo is unsustainable. And yet again, we saw how the conflict exploded. And yet, even though the status quo is obviously unsustainable, we're heading right back to the status quo. And that is the ethology of this conflict, the chronic nature of it that makes the whole situation even more depressing.

You asked about the New York Times story and about the U.S.-Israel relationship as manifested in this crisis, and there are -- and the story itself pointed out these conflicting trends. On the one hand, language used by both sides -- the United States on the record criticizing Israel with language that we have not heard before that I can remember, and the Israeli government back grounding the Israeli press with vitriolic language about the efforts of the United States to achieve a cease fire that also, I think, were unprecedented -- unleashed unprecedented attack in the Israeli press on our secretary of state.

So that's on the one side. On the other side, as the article pointed out, the president signs a bill for \$225 million more in security assistance to pay for additional Iron Dome capabilities for Israel. And both the prime minister on the one side and secretary of state and the president on the other singing each other's praises as we come out of this conflict.

So take your pick. I go back to -- you asked if it was unprecedented. I go back to 1982 when I first came to Washington to work when there was another round of this chronic conflict in which Ariel Sharon, defense minister, was prosecuting a war in Lebanon which produced horrific photos of children being injured and killed, much like we've seen in the last couple of weeks. And Ronald Reagan got very upset with Menachem Begin and used some fairly harsh words in those days. So in a sense, we've seen this movie before. Somehow each time the relationship survives, moves on, and that's partly because it has deep roots and there's a strong popular support for Israel that I'm sure has been damaged to some extent, but probably will rebound.

So in a sense, it's (speaking in foreign language) but I do think there's something else going on here that I also felt in the negotiating room, and that is that Israeli today is a different country to what it was say back in 1982 and for most of its history. Today, it is strong economically, strong militarily, and has a range of relationships across the world with other powers beyond the United States. And those other powers, not only as far afield as China, India -- India, for instance, came out in support of Israel during this conflict which I believe is unprecedented, a testament not just to the different politics of Prime Minister Modi, but also to the strategic relationship that has now been built between Israel and India.

But it's with China and India and certain countries in Southeast Asia, and it's in Eastern Europe, and it's with Russia. The absentia, or actually the absence -- they were absent for a vote in the United Nations General Assembly condemning the takeover of Crimea by Russia was something that really raised eyebrows in Washington. We never experienced that before.

MS. WITTES: So you're saying they don't need us anymore?

MR. INDYK: No, no. Definitely not saying that. What I'm saying is that

they feel more independent of the United States than they have in the past, more that they can stand on their own two feet. And the point I was trying to get to was that they also feel that they have relationships in the Arab world that they never had before, and that manifested itself very clearly in the way that Israel and Egypt seem to have a common interest in taking Hamas down, backed by Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States, with the exception of Qatar. And quietly Jordan, Morocco, the Sunni monarchs, essentially, plus the CC regime in Egypt. And to some extent, the Palestinian authority, which has long been -- Fatah has long been a rival of Hamas.

So there's this interesting kind of alignment of interest that Israel feels it was able to play on in this crisis and conflict in a way that it hasn't felt before. So I think that there's something of a more structural nature, a shifting of the plates, if you like, in the relationship, which it's too early to say what it will actually mean, but I do think it's manifesting itself in this crisis.

MS. WITTES: So Israel and Egypt together could essentially say at the beginning of this conflict three or four weeks ago, okay, we don't want the U.S. to be the architect of a cease-fire arrangement. We're going to work that out ourselves and pick our interlocutors ourselves. Does that say something broader about the traditional American mediating role in the peace process?

MR. INDYK: I think it's possible, but it's a little early to say. Certainly, up until now, any Arab leader who sought to make peace with Israel looked to Washington, and looked to Washington to in effect deliver Israel or deliver concessions from Israel. Starting with Anwar Sadat after the 1973 war, he famously said, "The United States gives Israel everything from a loaf of bread to a phantom jet -- state-of-the-art in those days -- and therefore, I'm going to Washington." And he kicked out the Soviet Union and turned to Washington. That was the best example and the most important because it produced

the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty. And that has certainly been the view of the Palestinian leadership, starting with Arafat, and certainly Abu Mazen. But I do think that Abu Mazen is reaching the point -- reached the point during the negotiations where he had a question mark about whether we could, in fact, deliver the kinds of concessions he was looking for to achieve a two-state solution. And indeed, you saw it in the conditions that he set for extending the negotiations by another nine months. He insisted not just on the release of the fourth tranche of prisoners, but also on a construction freeze in the West Bank and Jerusalem for three months while the boards were drawn. And the construction freeze set, which is something that is impossible for this Israeli government to do. But I think he said it was a test of this government, and a test of the United States' government. If we can't deliver that, then how are we going to deliver what he needs in Jerusalem or end of the occupation, or evacuation of settlements and so on?

So I do think that the length of time that it's taken since, let's say since the Clinton parameters of 2000, now 14 years later, or 20 years from the beginning of the (inaudible) process, the failure to achieve or breakthrough to a two-state solution, which we have been the sponsors of ever since Bill Clinton stood there on the White House lawn with his arms around -- symbolically around Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, they shook hands. Our credibility, I believe, has been affected by that.

MS. WITTES: And not only on the Israeli side, but you're saying on the Palestinian side and on the broader Arab world as well.

And Khaled, let me turn to you. May of the critics of Secretary Kerry's initial attempt at a swift cease-fire said that the danger of that effort would have empowered Hamas and its violent rejection of Israel at the expense of Palestinian authority -- at the expense of Fatah and Mahmoud Abbas, who is the recognized interlocutor for Israel in the negotiations, and who has embraced the two-state solution.



Now, clearly the delay in getting to a cease fire and let's -- assuming the cease fire holds. But this delay has come at a horrific human cost. Has it successfully avoided a situation whereby Hamas is empowered at the expense of Fatah and the PLO? What is a cease-fire if they get to terms on a lasting cease-fire, what do those terms need to include in order to ensure that Mahmoud Abbas remains the central player for Palestinians in any future negotiations with Israel?

MR. ELGINDY: As to the first question, I would say no. The simple answer is no. The simple answer is no, basically because I think the longer -- I think the fundamental calculation that somehow this is not -- Palestinians draw conclusions on an entirely different set of assumptions than folks in Washington do. That may come as a shock to a lot of people. But I think this is a very Washingtonian and Israeli sort of calculation that somehow the longer the war goes on it will weaken Hamas and strengthen Abu Mazen. That has never been the case, and it's actually much less the case now in this conflict. Obviously, you know, this is the third such conflict in the last six years, and each and every time Mahmoud Abbas is marginalized, weakened the longer it goes on because it's not about military victories. It's not even really about casualties. It is about the two programs of the two sides. Mahmoud Abbas's program, he has been very pliant, he has security coordination in the West Bank, he's committed to peaceful resolution of the conflict. And so what's gotten him is largely ignored.

Hamas, on the other hand, rockets and the past suicide bombings and other forms of violence, what that has gotten them actually is paid attention to and actually produced some results. I mean, the prisoner exchange issue is one, I think, very notable example where Hamas got a thousand prisoners, and we all know that the failure to release the last batch of prisoners in the latest negotiations essentially led to the collapse of that process for Mahmoud Abbas. So I think there's a real sense among

Palestinians that Hamas's way, as painful as it is, produces more results. And that's true. I think it's even more true in this conflict because it's coming on the heels of the failed negotiations, and because we've been down this road so many times before. And what we've actually seen is that Mahmoud Abbas has actually moved closer to Hamas's position rather than the other way around.

So in previous conflicts, I think Mahmoud Abbas was reluctant to -- of course, he can't side with Israel against another group of Palestinians, but he was reluctantly to openly embrace Hamas. This time around, Fatah, the PLO, the PA, the entire Palestinian leadership has openly, and I think enthusiastically, embraced Hamas and the resistance.

MS. WITTES: Of course, this is also in the context of a reconciliation agreement that had been reached a month or two prior to --

MR. ELGINDY: Right. And so this was a real test for the reconciliation agreement. I mean, it hadn't even barely, you know, the ink was barely dry when this conflict started. So it could easily have kind of torpedoed the whole thing, but it didn't. It actually, I think, worked in the opposite direction. It really consolidated a Palestinian unity.

And as far as the -- I think this kind of cuts to a sort of underlying -- you know, one of the key assumptions of U.S. policy and Israeli policy that I think has been a real failure the last eight years -- well, to the extent the U.S. has had a policy over the last eight years on Gaza, which I don't think it has -- but, you know, we've been pursuing this policy of separating Gaza from the West Bank, keeping Palestinians divided, played this guy off of that guy, I mean, this is not really -- I think this is not what diplomacy is made of. This is frankly how colonialism operates. It's not how diplomacy works. It's not how peacemaking works. You make peace with a group as it is. Palestinians as such. The

notion that we could make peace with one group of Palestinians and support war against other Palestinians was never going to work. And that's now played itself out. It was either going to drive Hamas into the peace camp or drive Mahmoud Abbas into Hamas's -  
- to adopt Hamas's positions.

MS. WITTES: Now, weren't there some who saw this reconciliation agreement as to some extent, Hamas on its back feet? And joining Abbas but in a much weaker position than --

MR. INDYK: Right. On its terms. Right.

MS. WITTES: Than in previous rounds. So where do the two sit today? What's the power differential today, and how can Abbas keep the upper hand, assuming that's his goal, which I assume it is?

MR. INDYK: Yeah. I think, you know, Hamas went into this reconciliation agreement before the war very much as the junior partner, which is unlike where we were two years ago. But they went in this time, they're the junior partner, and they come out of this, I think, very much as an equal partner, at least. And I think one of the positive -- probably the only positive development to come out of this, is the consolidation of Palestinian unity that in fact you have a unified Palestinian leadership that is negotiated in Cairo as a practical matter. It's not simply a matter of show or a matter of expediency. It is a practical matter. Hamas needs Fatah as much as Fatah needs Hamas at this point. I think Hamas understands that there is no chance for them to open the border in Gaza without a role for the Palestinian authority. And at the same time, the Palestinian authority has been desperately looking for a role in Gaza and Mahmoud Abbas has been trying to reassert his relevance in things related to Gaza. So there is a win-win situation in terms of the relevance of both sides. And I think Hamas's position now is very firmly embedded into the Palestinian landscape in a way that a few --

let's say a month ago -- it was not. It was much more precarious, like that of let's say the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. But now they are, I think, you've got this broader Palestinian safety net around Hamas that has cushioned it in a way.

MS. WITTES: Okay. So perhaps that presents an opportunity for later negotiations if later negotiations are an option. And with that, I think we should probably take a look at the Israeli side of the equation as well. And Natan, I think if we look at the Israeli position three weeks ago and the way this cease fire came about, it seems as though the Israeli government got everything it said it wanted. It got an opportunity to go in and destroy the tunnel networks on the ground. It got a degradation of Hamas's rocket capability. And now it was able to withdraw its ground forces and get a cease fire without any preconditions, without making any concessions to Hamas or to anyone else up front.

So a couple of questions. First, you know, within the Israeli debate, we saw a surge in support for the government, for Netanyahu. Is there any questioning in Israel today about whether the gains were worth those additional three weeks of conflict, and the lives lost, and the international censure and everything else that came along with it? And how do you expect this experience to shape the political dynamics, particularly for this Israeli government going forward?

MR. SACHS: Well, the Israeli position going in from the start, and this may surprise people, was very clearly to avoid this conflict in Gaza. The hope was to contain the unrest that we already saw in the West Bank, and Netanyahu was really very eager to avoid this kind of confrontation, but even a simpler one in the Gaza strip.

The so the first move was actually to turn to the Egyptians just as we did in the end and -- or as everyone did in the end -- and try to reach some kind of understanding before even there was an official name for this operation by the Israelis.

The second stage was the aerial operation, which was already quite

severe, but it looked a lot more like 2012, the last round of this war of attrition.

The third stage, which started only after another cease fire brokered -- or offered I should say -- by the Egyptians and rejected by Hamas, then it became much more similar to 2008, and we saw the dramatic images that we saw now.

So all these three confrontations -- 2008, 2012, and now, in the Israeli minds, Israeli public, and the political scene, is seen as basically three rounds as the same war. At the core of that war there's a very difficult dilemma that Israel faces, which is what do you do with this territory that is very close to the center of Israel? You saw the rockets reaching all the way up to Haifa, but certainly, the Tel Aviv area, et cetera, and Jerusalem, very close to the center of Israel, governed by an organization which, at least in the Israeli mind, makes no qualms about its position, about Israel, even about Jews. About certainly the idea of peace. At most in English in The Washington Post, when it tries to put on the best face, it says a long-term cease fire. So from an Israeli position, it's very clear what they're facing.

What do you do with that kind of territory? And it's very reminiscent. You have a quasi-political, quasi-military organization, effectively ruling a state or a region and waging war from it, intent on continuing to wage a war. What do you do?

And in a sense there are three very bad options. One is you take it over completely. And you asked if there is debate in Israel; there is. But it may surprise people it's on the other side. The debate is mostly shouldn't Netanyahu have gone much further? In 2012, he suffered politically, partly by not going further, not even bringing in the reservists. There was a very large number of reservists called up in 2012, partly as a bluff to Hamas, and Hamas caved. And so they weren't sent in. There was a lot of resentment among some of them why couldn't we finish the job? We're just going to go back to this in a couple of years.

Naftali Bennett, who rose, the leader of the Jewish home on the right, and the internal rival, Netanyahu, gained a lot of popularity just then, criticizing Netanyahu over this. So there's that kind of argument.

The second possibility for the Israelis perhaps is to just let Hamas rearm, lift all the restrictions, and basically just hope for the best. Given the Israelis' long experience with Hamas and the way they understand Hamas, the chance of that happening is nil, and the experience of this conflict, especially the revelations of the extent of the tunnel system, makes that much less likely. That's not going to happen.

The third option is this very grim, unsatisfactory status quo. It's not static, of course, but reality where constantly we see small things, supposedly inadvertently perhaps, causing these huge configurations. So Netanyahu going in didn't want it. There were many in the Israeli political system, especially the ones without the actual authority, who liked Netanyahu when he had no authority, said, "Go in all the way. Take down Hamas. This is the chance to do it." Most notably from the political perspective is the Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who has broken with Netanyahu. They were close allies. Now they're broken. He's trying to differentiate to the right, competing with Benitez leader of the right. So that's been a dramatic thing.

And notably, another minister to look for is Gideon Sa'ar, Minister of Education, is an important player in Likud who also broke to the right.

But the people really in charge, most of the members of the small security cabinet, which is legally the commander-in-chief of the IDF. It's not the prime minister. It's the security cabinet. And especially, the central ministers -- the prime minister; the minister of defense, Bogie Ya'alon, who is very hawkish on peace issues -- Martin can talk to that more -- but very hawkish on that. And Tzipi Livni, who is very dovish compared to this government on peace issues. But on this was part actually of

the inner circle. And their position won in the end, which is on the one hand very heavy-handed in terms of confronting Hamas, (inaudible) Hamas, and of course, the horrific human costs that we are seeing. And we should not mince words about this but what we saw in the last few weeks. But on the other hand, also an unwillingness to go all the way and in a sense bring down Hamas completely and try and change the reality from the ground and stuck with the same position.

I'd say there's one silver lining. We have seen a dramatic shift -- it's a small shift but I think it's quite important -- and that relates to what Khaled ended with, which is on the role of Abbas especially in the Gaza strip. The Israelis have long seen the Palestinian authority security forces as quite reliable and certainly much better than they used to be in the past, and of course, no comparison to Hamas. And now even people like Bogie Ya'alon, the Minister of Defense, (inaudible) are talking about bring PA forces to the Rafah crossing, which would allow the Egyptians to trust the Palestinian forces on the other side, will allow some opening of the Gaza Strip, some alleviation of the human condition inside there, and would give in a sense a victory to Egypt, which is very close to the Egypt-Israel position in this regard.

That of course is backtracking somewhat from the very staunch Israeli position against the reconciliation government, which is, of course all technocratic government, and we saw even just today or yesterday the foreign minister breaking with that, criticizing this idea saying we cannot trust Abbas, he's not a partner, et cetera. So we see some kind of reflection of that.

I'll just end with this. The Israeli public, the latest poll today that we saw on Channel 2 has the Israeli public split down the middle on whether this was a success or not. About 40 some percent for success, not success. Support for Netanyahu's conduct is quite high. Netanyahu is viewed in the Israeli position as being very cautious,

very steady hand, not going after the extreme right wing. This is going to surprise readers of the European press but he's very obscene that way in this context.

The flipside of that, on the critical side, is that in a sense Israel going in had no clear goal. The tunnels were not the goal in the beginning. Israel wanted a cease fire before it all happened. It tried to get a cease fire before one soldier entered the Gaza Strip. There were only airstrikes. And the tunnels were not the main goal there.

Israel, in a sense, was dragged along by Hamas, that kept insisting on having this battle until its conditions were met, especially on the closure, notwithstanding the human suffering in Gaza, which Hamas shares at least some blame to. But from the Israeli perspective, they were dragged along. Now, that is caution. It can be commendable in some regards, but it also suggests something wrong about how Israelis approach this whole thing. Such a dramatic event that will change its position and was really dragged along by this small organization.

MS. WITTES: And I think your description of how Netanyahu and the government viewed this longstanding standoff with Hamas and the dilemma that it confronts in dealing with Hamas, reinforces Khaled's point about really seeing the West Bank and Hamas as two separate problems. West Bank and Gaza as two separate problems. Has Netanyahu now rediscovered Abbas?

MR. SACHS: Yeah. That's the latest (inaudible) is that they rediscovered Abbas. But rediscovered Abbas in the small sense. It's small A Abbas. It's Abbas that can take care of the border, that throughout this conflict, even when we saw conflict in Jerusalem before the Gaza thing really blew up, we saw conflict there and we saw some reports of Fatah people taking responsibility for firing live ammunition at Israeli soldiers. That was a dramatic moment. To my mind, a very, very dangerous one. But these were Fatah forces, not the official PA ones. And throughout this, the Israelis have



noted that the PA forces have remained steady to the mission, the Abbas mission, which has been a peaceful one, which has been not getting involved in this conflict.

And so in that regard, yes. Has it changed the way they see Abbas with the peace process in general? No. What it has done is reinforced two very strong trends among Israelis. The first is the feeling that they can't win. The fundamental question that they ask -- I've quoted this before, but Amos Oz, who is a very famous author and a very, very famous vocal voice of the left wing in Israel. He is one of the voices of peace now unofficially. He posed this question in Doychaveta saying what would you do if there was a region in your area that was firing rockets on you. He put it in more colorful terms. If there was someone holding his baby on his lap and shooting at your nursery, what would you do? And this is very strong in the Israeli perception, especially given that it's Gaza. That it's Hamas at the other side, by which Israelis have no illusions as to what it is, and secondly, from the Israeli perspective, from which they withdrew.

So the perception of Gaza was very central to the way they approached this whole thing. It may weaken the differentiation between the Gaza Strip and West Bank, which could be positive in the long term, but it very much strengthened the Israeli view of what happens if you unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip. This will have dramatic ramifications for plan Bs in the West Bank, but also, as Khaled mentioned, on the Palestinian side, these have been very traumatic weeks, from the kidnapping of the three teenagers through all this, and the hardening of positions, the rallying around the flag has been very dramatic. Inside the Israeli society as well there has been a very strong consensus and even a shutting down a bit of people who are not supporting the troops in time of war in a sense.

MR. INDYK: Can I just add one point to that?

MS. WITTES: Yes. And as you do, Martin, I'd like you to respond also

to this idea that the United States has treated the West Bank and Gaza as two distinct issues in its diplomacy as well.

MR. INDYK: You said it makes it harder for those in Israel ever getting plan B, which was unilateral withdrawal from some of the West Bank. But it also makes it much harder for plan A, that is to say a negotiated solution.

Prime Minister Netanyahu before this latest round of war in Gaza had already begun to articulate the position that the fear of a Gaza in the West Bank or tunnels in the West bank into Israel proper meant that Israel would have to keep the Israel defense forces out in the Shin Bet security services in the West Bank. Not just on the Jordan River but in the West Bank for a very long time. And that position, articulated before, articulated during by him at a press conference -- correct me if I'm wrong -- but I think that resonates a lot as a result of this conflict with the Israeli public.

And so the whole concept of a two-state solution which requires an end to Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the actual withdrawal of the IDF and the Shin Bet from the West Bank now becomes really questionable. Because if the Prime Minister of Israel is saying we have to stay there for a very long time -- by the way, when you press him on a very long time, he says 30 years -- it used to be during our negotiations, along the Jordan River. But now he says in the West Bank as well.

So that means that there's not going to be an end to the occupation. And that puts a big question mark in the minds of those Palestinians from Abu Mazen and to his security chiefs who have justified security coordination with Israel on the basis that there will eventually be an end to the occupation -- not in 30 years, but in let's say five years. That becomes justification. If that's not the case, if the Israeli view now is we're going to have to stay there for 30 years, which for the Palestinians is equivalent to forever, then that puts another nail into the coffin of the two-state solution. And for those

like me who have always managed to look for the pony in the pile of shit --

MS. WITTES: That's a diplomatic term of art.

MR. INDYK: You know, there's that hope that Israelis will now see that Abu Mazen is much better, even a partner because of the way that he behaved during the kidnapping crisis and the way that Hamas has behaved since, so that maybe there will be support in Israel to help Abu Mazen eventually take control in Gaza and that will unite the Palestinians as Hamad says is necessary under Abu Mazen's leadership, and that will form the basis for resuming negotiations of the two-state solution. But it seems to me -- I'd just be interested in your reaction -- it just seems to me that the right wing in Israel is now going after Abu Mazen for a reason. That's why Lieberman has come out against him and before him I think it was -- or Donald Elkin, I think also a right wing member, who came out against doing anything for Abu Mazen because for them, they can sense it, that Israelis are taking Abu Mazen more seriously. But to build up Abu Mazen means to strengthen the idea of a two-state solution, which they don't want.

MS. WITTES: Right.

MR. ELGINDY: If I may. I think it's very true, and I think it's very, very dangerous, but we should remember that this is the gut reaction. So it's immediately after a war. We see this and Israelis hardening down. But even among the troika, that was the leading done -- there's big differences between (inaudible) position, huge differences between (inaudible), as you know better than I. So it's true, and it's very worrisome, but I'm not sure it necessarily is as longstanding as the lessons that Israelis have learned in their mind on unilateralism or on Hamas.

MS. WITTES: Okay. So it might be more dynamic than it appears. Let's hope so.

MR. INDYK: The pony is still there, right?

MS. WITTES: The pony is still there, Martin. Don't worry.

MR. INDYK: Somewhere.

MS. WITTES: Khaled, I want to get your thoughts on this, and also on the idea that if what -- now BB sees -- there's something he wants and needs from Mahmoud Abbas, but he wants him as a policeman and a border guard basically, which are precisely the roles that have generated so much resentment and opposition within Palestinian society. So how does this play out for him? How does he calculate?

MR. ELGINDY: Yeah. I don't think it plays out very well for him if that is, in fact, going to remain his role. I think we have to make a distinction between empowering Abu Mazen at the expense of Hamas, which I think is a failed policy. That's been the policy over the last eight years, and it's still the Israeli approach, and that can only, you know, that sort of a zero sum, I think is just futile and self-defeating.

The other way to do it is to empower Abbas by including Hamas under his umbrella, under the umbrella of the PLO, to have a share in power, to have a stake in the political process so that it is less inclined to torpedo it if it's on the inside than if it's on the outside. But I think all of this kind of points to another I think fundamental failure in U.S. policy, which is oddly enough, very much unlike the previous administration. In fact, it's the reverse. Here we have an administration that is focused almost exclusively on conflict resolution -- negotiations, final status, and that's it. To the total neglect of any sense of conflict management, and I think any real viable peace process has to have both. You know, George W. Bush gets criticized for doing too much conflict management and not enough conflict resolution. I think we can criticize this administration for focusing exclusively on conflict resolution and ignoring conflict management so that, you know, and part of that disconnect I think relates to Gaza and Hamas. We don't have a policy for Gaza and Hamas. So we just have to wait for that conflict to play itself out.

Obviously, whereas I know a lot of people in Washington say, well, you know, it was only 1,800 Gazans who died. Palestinians see it as these are 1,800 of their brothers and sisters who were killed. And I think this raises another issue. I think in terms of how Israel conducts warfare, I think the whole -- if we come out of this with anything other than, you know, why it's important to avoid these kinds of violent conflict relations in the first place, when they do start, I think there has to be rules to the game. The notion that Israel's military doctrine of overwhelming disproportionate force is somehow acceptable, I think we need to really reconsider that.

I don't think this is a legitimate way to conduct a military operation by deliberately inflicting as much pain on the other side. I mean, after all, that is the essential tenet of the Dahiya doctrine is to be disproportionate. And there's a reason that proportionality is a basic principle in international humanitarian law. So when you have something that flies in the face of that and you see the kind of definite destruction that you have in the Gaza Strip, you know, out of all proportion to any threat that Hamas may have, you know, this has real consequences. It has human consequences. It has moral consequences. It has political consequences. Clearly, Mahmoud Abbas is not going to be in a hurry to embrace any Israeli leaders or even to do his security bidding or Israel's security bidding in the West Bank. It makes his position much more precarious. But I think there are also security ramifications for this. When you have that much human misery, and Gaza was not a happy place to begin with, but you throw on top of that, you know, 400 children who were killed and 10,000 homes destroyed and 400,000 displaced, I mean, it's just really simply I think outrageous.

And this is where American leadership comes in. You know, there was -- once upon a time there was something called the Road Map, if anybody remembers that. And the logic of the Road Map -- not that I'm a huge fan of that particular document -- but

it had a certain logic in terms of conflict resolution, which is that when there is death on one side, it embitters that side and makes them want to inflict death on the other side. And that's just I think basic common sense. The notion that you can only have a deterrent for Israel and that somehow Palestinians will just be deterred quietly and go quietly into the night I think is really just not a sound idea. So we need to think about how to prevent these conflicts in the first place, and when they do happen, to make sure that there is a degree of reasonableness to how they're conducted. Otherwise, we've completely destroyed, in addition to I think losing our humanity, we've completely destroyed our credibility.

MS. WITTES: So I think part of what you're getting at is the iterative nature of this confrontation and the dilemma that Natan was describing for Israel in confronting Hamas, the fact that this has recurred now three times in the last six years generates an ongoing impact that undermines the prospects for conflict resolution. And so, you know, ultimately conflict resolution will eliminate or ideally eliminate the prospects for another round but there are things you have to do in the meantime as well.

MR. ELGINDY: In the meantime.

MS. WITTES: Which is an excellent point.

MR. ELGINDY: And I would just add that, you know, since we're going into a period where we're not likely to see renewed permanent status negotiations, we are in now a long-term conflict management situation. So we ought to have a policy on it to prevent these kinds of atrocities down the road.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. I think it's a good point.

Martin, I want to give you a chance to weigh in on whether the U.S. had a Gaza strategy in these negotiations, but I also want to make a plug on this question of deterrence and proportionality and doctrine.

Our colleague, Dan Byman, had a very good discussion in foreign policy a couple of weeks ago that I would commend to all of you who are interested in delving further into that subject.

Martin. And then I will open it up for questions.

MR. INDYK: Thanks. Look, I understand very well Khaled's criticism and his passionate conviction on this matter. And I share his view that it's unacceptable that over 400 children could be killed in this conflict. But we do have to put it in context. The context is one in which Hamas was targeting Israeli civilians, and the only reason that the casualty rate wasn't higher on the Israeli side was because they had a means of protecting their civilians, whereas Hamas does not have the means of protecting their civilians. They never paid any attention to protecting their civilians whatsoever. It's not as if they built air raid shelters for them. Instead, they were firing rockets from civilian areas. Now, we all know that, but I think you can't just condemn the Israelis on this side without putting into context the circumstances that they faced.

Now, the criticism of the administration, and to answer your question, the effort to resolve the conflict that the secretary of state and the president undertook and that I had the honor to be involved in came out of a belief that you needed to find a way to break out of the chronic nature of this conflict. You needed to try to resolve it. It's not as if the resolution was any great mystery. It was a question of trying to find the two sides to break out of this and actually make the difficult, hard, gut wrenching decisions, political risky decisions, that would make it possible to resolve this conflict.

Now, obviously, in terms of resolving the conflict, you have to address Gaza, but that was an issue was to be addressed, and both sides agreed to this in the final status negotiations. I mean, the Palestinian Authority also -- the PLO, I should say. That was an issue that would be addressed once the whole agreement had been struck

because then it would obviously have to involve the opening of Gaza. You know, there wasn't a territorial issue there but there was a question of control of its borders. That would have had to have been part of the final deal. And then Gazans would see that they had an opportunity to have freedom in their own independent Palestinian state with a date for the end of the occupation, and that would put immense pressure on Hamas to go along with it.

So that was essentially the theory of the case. We never got to test it. To say that, well, it would have been better off engaging in conflict management is essentially to say that, you know, we're not going to be able to resolve this conflict so we should just manage it and try to keep it contained. But there was a fundamental decision made by the secretary and the president that that was only going to lead to more conflicts like the things we've seen here.

MS. WITTES: But you thought, and the Israeli and PLO delegations thought that you could push resolution of Gaza issues down the road, that you had time in other words, to do that.

MR. INDYK: No. We didn't have a choice.

MS. WITTES: Okay.

MR. INDYK: We didn't have a choice. Why? Because Hamas controls Gaza. And Hamas is not interested in peace with Israel. It's an inconvenient truth that Hamas is not interested in peace with Israel. And therefore, you can't construct a peace negotiation with Hamas.

Now, maybe as a result of this it becomes possible that the Palestinian leadership under Abu Mazen will somehow convince Hamas that it should go along with a two-state solution and acceptance of Israel, but there's no indication that Hamas is actually prepared to do that.



So it's fine to say we should have conflict management, but it doesn't treat the problem; it just ensures that we're going to have outbreaks of conflict from time to time. There is nothing that we could do to prevent that from happening.

MS. WITTES: You've been a very patient audience. I want to give Khaled one minute to respond.

MR. ELGINDY: Less than a minute.

Just to clarify, my point isn't either or that we have conflict resolution or conflict management, but that we conduct the two together. That's what a peace process ought to do so that there is a safety net for when the negotiations collapse, rather than simply kind of drifting towards the abyss as we often do whenever negotiations collapse.

So all I'm saying is that there needs to be some thought put into conflict management when negotiations are not happening or possible.

MR. INDYK: What does that mean though? Something that we didn't do?

MR. ELGINDY: I mean, something like the Road Map is designed that, you know, look, there is extremism on the Palestinian side. We all know that.

MR. INDYK: Didn't you write an article about putting a knife into the Road Map?

MR. ELGINDY: Yes. But compared to what we have today, which is basically just a vacuum, I think the Road Map is fantastic by comparison because there was a sense of mutuality. Yes, Hamas rejects Israel and there are horrible things in its charter, but there are horrible things in the Likud charter. There are horrible things that the deputy (inaudible) speaker says about ethnically cleansing Palestinians.

MS. WITTES: Okay.

MR. ELGINDY: There are horrible things that both sides say and do to

each other. That's the definition of a conflict. So we can't resolve the conflict before we've resolved the conflict.

MS. WITTES: As a practical matter, I guess what I would say, too, is that Israel had a conflict management strategy for Gaza. Whether the United States acknowledged it or not, which was to have a close alliance with the Egyptians to keep Hamas in a box and go after them if necessary. And that's exactly what we saw play out.

SPEAKER: Mowing the grass.

MS. WITTES: So at this point I'm going to open it up for your questions. I'm going to request -- nay, enforce that they be questions, and that you get one of them.

So if you would, please, when I call on you, wait for the microphone to get to you, identify yourself, and then ask your single question. And why don't we start actually with the gentleman right next to the microphone.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. My question to Ambassador Indyk, what is your opinion on the Egyptian initiative?

MS. WITTES: Okay. What's your opinion on which Egyptian initiative?

SPEAKER: What Egypt offered now for the two sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians are now in Cairo. So --

MS. WITTES: So what do we expect to come out of that?

SPEAKER: Yes.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Let's take a couple more if that's okay with you. Young man in the back with the white shirt and the tie. Yes.

SPEAKER: My question is about the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The Palestinians in Gaza seems themselves pretty pessimistic about the current status quo, and given the humanitarian situation there now, do you see any potential for movement either in the Israeli position on the siege or perhaps in the

American political will to force some sort of change, either in what appears to be the expanded buffer zone or the coastal waters, anything related to the humanitarian situation?

MS. WITTES: Okay. So how might it play out? How might these negotiations in Cairo, too, play out in terms of the closure of Gaza?

And Sayed, I will give you the last of this section.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Tamara. My name is Sayed Arica. I'm a Palestinian journalist. My question to --

MS. WITTES: Hold that right next to you. There you go.

SPEAKER: My question to Ambassador Indyk, how did the failed negotiations that you just concluded play into this conflict? And second, are these talks frozen forever? And then to both --

MS. WITTES: Uh-uh. Now, you've already violated my rule, so I'm going to stop you there. Thank you, Sayed.

Okay. Martin, why don't you start?

MR. INDYK: Do I have to?

MS. WITTES: You knew that one was coming.

MR. INDYK: Just quickly. The Egyptian initiative, from the outset there has been, you know, I think almost universal support for the Egyptian initiative, which was a cease fire in place for a limited period of time. Now it's 72 hours. It originally started I think seven days, during which time the issues of concern to both sides would be negotiated. The issues since the Egyptians first came out with the initiative, that's the only part that's been in contention, is what are the issues on the agenda? And the cease fire proposal that Secretary Kerry put in place was essentially a kind of operationalization of the Egyptian initiative in terms of the things that needed to be addressed, which were

coming to the second question, issues of freedom of movement, of people and goods in and out of Gaza, whether the fishermen could use the waters out to the 12 mile limit, and whether the farmers could operate in what the second question referred to as the buffer zones. I believe that all of those questions are on the agenda in Cairo, together with, while though it's not mentioned there in the latest version of the Egyptian initiative, there's a general reference to security, but I believe that the Israelis will bring to the table their demand that in return for conceding some of the issues -- and by the way, the Egyptians themselves are going to have to agree to open their passage which they've been much stricter in terms of blocking than the Israelis have in the last year, that the Israeli demand is that the Palestinian militias of terrorist organizations, not just Hamas but Palestine's (inaudible) various other groups there, PFLP, disarm.

And so I think that that's the agenda. Those are the issues that are going to have to be addressed in one way or another. Whether they can do it in 72 hours, I'm deeply skeptical of that. Whether they can do it in 72 days or even 72 months I'm also skeptical about having seen how dysfunctional negotiations are between Israelis and Palestinians. But it's necessary to try. It's necessary in particular in my view to take advantage of the fact that Hamas agreed in its reconciliation agreement with Fatah to resign its government in Gaza, which it did, to have the Palestinian authority take control in Gaza. That was all agreed before this conflict broke out. And that should be the basis upon which the issues are resolved. That is to say the Palestinian authority should take control in Gaza; that it should start in the passes, which I think everybody is ready to agree to, but that it should also extend its grid to Gaza proper. And that starts with working with the U.N. and the international community on the emergency humanitarian aid that needs to go in, then working with the international community with U.N. monitors on all of the construction material that's going to have to go into reconstruct Gaza, and in

that way, legitimizing the Palestinian authority, which has already been legitimated politically in the Fatah Hamas reconciliation agreement.

And finally, as part of that process to uphold the principle that Abu Mazen has repeatedly advocated, which is one government, one law, one gun. And the guns can only be in the hands of the Palestinian authority, cannot be a Lebanon solution where the militias or terrorist groups retain their guns. So that would be the ideal process, and one in which Israel should be able to accept that in the process of disarmament there is the full opening of the passages.

Finally, to Sayed's question, look, you know, if I compare it to the end of the Clinton administration when we tried to get a comprehensive deal and failed and that led to a huge disappointment which contributed to the circumstances which caused the outbreak of the intifada, I do not see that as a comparable situation. There was no sense of disappointment. Nobody on either side seemed to believe that it was possible in the first place, and both sides did their best to reinforce that opinion in their publics. So there was no sense of letdown. There was no sense of failure. Everybody kind of accepted it. Oh, well, they couldn't do it anymore.

But more importantly, in any event, Hamas didn't believe it was going to work. And Hamas did not try to disrupt the effort. Nor did Hezbollah for that matter or Iran, who had always done their best through terrorism to prevent the breakthrough to a peace agreement. They didn't lift their fingers this time because they didn't believe it was possible.

Now, I think that the dynamic that led to the outbreak of this conflict was unrelated to what we were trying to do in the peace process. That was the dynamic that finds its origins in the deposing of CC -- excuse me, of Morsi, the rise of CC, the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the determination of the Egyptian

government under CC to choke Hamas, the bastard child of the Muslim brotherhood, and cut off all the tunnels and cut off all the revenue to Hamas, which put it in a desperate situation, which led it to the reconciliation agreement with Fatah, which led the Israeli government to suspend the negotiations.

So I see that that dynamic, which was independent of anything we were trying to do, came in from left field and basically upended the table. And that is what then resulted in the effort to press Hamas in the West Bank, which I think contributed to the explosion in Gaza.

MS. WITTES: Okay. And, of course, Israel was not at all sorry to see CC and the Israeli government take that attitude, cut off the smuggling tunnels, and repeatedly declared over the last months that their relationship with this Egyptian government on security issues in Gaza is the best they've had in years, all of this begging the question of how ready are the Israelis -- and we can talk about the Egyptians, too -- to loosen the closure of Gaza under the circumstances Martin is describing where the PA might come in on the borders? And given that this is a weak PA, even if it manages to police the Rafah border, the idea of the PA disarming the other militias in the Gaza Strip seems like a long way down the road, if we can envision it at all.

Natan?

MR. SACHS: I'm not super optimistic, and the reason is one that Martin touched on, and that is the crux of the whole issue. And that's the monopoly of force, the very definition of a state. Hamas, being extremists, there are extremists on the Israeli side as well. They don't control an area. They don't have an army. They don't engage in war against Jordan. They don't -- they don't constitute in a sense a second state.

Now, Hamas, it's not a new thing. It's not just since the violent coup when they took over the Gaza Strip. Hamas has been the central spoiler of the peace

process since Martin was involved in it way back in the '90s. What brought down the Rabin-Peres government, of course, was the assassination of Rabin by an Israeli extremist. What was more than anything was the loss of Peres in the election, which was precipitated mostly by Hamas bombings. That's what brought it down. The refusal by (inaudible) to do what the Israelis considered to be the heroic and extremely controversial move that had been granted way back early on, which was to open fire on the major opposition group, the one that now became Likud, Netanyahu's own father was a member of (inaudible). Bengoria and a young officer named (inaudible) opened fire on it because of the idea of unity of gun. Without it, I am very pessimistic because the Israelis, certainly the lesson that they learned from this is that if you let some men go into the Gaza Strip, it's not going to build shelters for the civilian population, and certainly not hospitals of schools. It's going to build tunnels. And so the chance that now they will be much more lenient is unrealistic.

MS. WITTES: Even if there is international monitoring Egyptians on their side of the border, PA control over Rafah.

MR. SACHS: That would help tremendously. And I think it would help tremendously with a lot of the very important aspects of the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. Even today, when you call it a siege, it suggests it's not the case. A siege is an attempt to starve a population into submission. The Gaza Strip, even during the way, there's, of course, transfer of water, electricity, and many other things. The situation is horrendous in Gaza, and Israel shares blame for it. Don't take me the wrong way. But it's not a siege, and it certainly could be alleviated dramatically if there were forces that the Egyptians in particular could trust on the Palestinian side.

But when fundamentally -- and this fundamental truth has been true from the beginning of the Aza process and before, since (inaudible) when there is no unity of

gun on the Palestinian side, it is very unlikely that especially now Israel will be able to deal credibly with the Palestinian side. And I think this touches on a deeper issue, which is we discuss a lot Israeli policy and American policy, and that's natural because Israel is a stronger power and the United States is a super power, but it's worth remembering that there is another side to this conflict, and their role in this conflict throughout the last more than six decades has not just been as passive victims to other people's malice. They have been agents. They have made political choices. The political choice for resistance, hallowed resistance, for example, is a choice. It's true that the Abu Mazen and Fayyad position has, as Fayyad said in one of our events last year, taken an indoctrinal feat. I have news for you. Resistance has had such a resounding doctrinal defeat in the past seven decades that the Palestinian choice to go for it, because seemingly there are no other options, is a terrible choice. This does not mean Israel is a party to the conflict, doesn't mean the conduct of war isn't important. But it does mean that the choice to engage in this conflict, in this round, and many others earlier, repeatedly, to avoid the same Egyptian cease fire which was offered. It's the same thing. It was offered before this whole thing happened. It was offered in the middle before the ground operation happened. And now it's being taken only 1,400 dead later in the Gaza Strip. This was Hamas's choice, and we should be discussing Palestinian political choices as well.

MS. WITTES: Thanks, Natan.

Khaled, I want to give you a chance to weigh in on that. And also, can Egypt, or would this Egyptian government trust Mahmoud Abbas and the PA on the border? Certainly, in terms of the political alignments Martin was talking about, they would like to support Mahmoud Abbas, but do they trust the capability of the PA to manage this border?

MR. ELGINDY: I'm not even convinced that they would like to support



Mahmoud Abbas given their support of people like Hamadalan.

I think there's a great deal of ambivalence toward Mahmoud Abbas. And the thing about weakness is that it's self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating. So Mahmoud Abbas, everyone thinks he is weak because he's weak, and he's weak because everyone thinks he's weak. And, you know, these are self-fulfilling kinds of a dynamic.

Mahmoud Abbas came to power with two objectives. One was to unify all Palestinian factions, bring them under one umbrella of the PLO, which Arafat had neglected to do since 1988. You had these free agent groups operating outside of the context of the PLO, so he had the foresight to understand this was a bad idea. 2005 Cairo Declaration was the First Palestinian -- intra-Palestinian agreement designed to bring not just one gun, but one set of political decision-making, which is essential to any movement, nation, institution, or government. So his second goal was to reach a conflict-ending deal with Israel. Both of those were dashed, and I think they're interconnected. Yes, Palestinians have agency, and there have been a number of decisions that are highly questionable by both the Palestinian authority and by Hamas, one of which is firing rockets when you know the sort of response that is going to come.

But from Hamas's standpoint, I think it was, you know, they're dead either way, so rather than go quietly into the night, they might as well go out with a bang. I mean, this is how I interpret their rationale. They, at least, were able to reassert their relevance. Cynical, terrible, yes, you know, but on the other side of the equation, if somebody is hiding behind children and they're completely reckless, you don't have to kill them. You, as Israel, the most powerful military in the region, you have other options. You have many choices. Anyway, put that aside.

The question of disarming, I agree with Martin 100 percent that there has to be an opening of the blockade. If what happens next is to simply go back to the status

quo ante minus 1,800 people and 10,000 homes and all this displacement, then we're going to have not only a humanitarian disaster, but there will be a very serious security disaster right on Israel's borders. I, personally, have never understood how having a young, angry, hungry, frustrated population on Israel's border was ever in their security interest, much less, you know, badly battered by bombs. Sorry for the alliteration.

The notion of disarming outside of the context of deoccupation I think is not realistic. I think we have to look at incentives. There is a reason why Hamas disarms even after so-called deterrents of cast led, they got better rockets with longer range and more of them. So deterrents isn't a deterrent if you don't address the incentive for arming. And occupation and siege, are those incentives? So simply addressing the symptoms I think is not going to be possible.

But look at it from a conflict resolution standpoint. If Hamas has to recognize Israel and disarm, and go along with everything that the international community wants, essentially, they've given Israel what they want, because Israel is not in a hurry to end the occupation to establish a Palestinian state in the heart of the biblical homeland of Judea and Samaria and to have Palestinian sovereignty in Jerusalem. These are things that will be very difficult for it to do. So if recognition and disarming are the standard, then there's simply no incentive for Palestinian actor to want to go along because arming is the counterpart to the occupation. Israel has a great deal of leverage. Well, then it's only logical that Palestinian actors will seek leverage. Since we know negotiations don't work, it's not a matter of choice. It's not a matter of saying we want to do this. It's simply a reality that when you have no other choice, people typically resort to arms, even when it's self-defeating.

MS. WITTES: All right. Let's stop there and take three or four more questions from the audience. And we'll start right here in the front row. If we can get a

microphone down front, please. We'll take a couple questions down front for the sake of the camera. Go ahead.

MS. GELLMAN: I'm Suzie Gellman. I have so many questions, it's hard to just ask one.

But I guess I'd like to ask Khaled about the Gazan people themselves who have suffered again so terribly. And I have a son who lives in Israel and I have lots of friends and I get there a lot, so I'm aware of what the mood is in Israel. But clearly, Gazan people have suffered -- civilians have been used by Hamas to their own affairs and are paying a terrible price in human suffering. We also have seen Hamas manipulating the international media to create one image coming out of Gaza. You don't see images of Hamas fighters except what little the Israeli media or the Army is portraying. And that does have an effect on world opinion about who is doing what to whom. You don't see images, for example, of Hamas rockets that go awry and hit a target -- not intentionally -- in Gaza. But my question is this. Assuming that God willing that there is a cease fire that holds and maybe even goes beyond 72 hours and that there is movement to really end at least this round of the conflict, do you have any hope that the Gaza people themselves will realize that to continue their own status quo is untenable for them; that it doesn't allow Gaza to achieve its potential, which frankly, it could be the Palestinian Riviera. I've seen the beaches. They're beautiful.

MS. WITTES: Okay.

MS. GELLMAN: So what do you think about the Gazan people demanding a change in terms of Hamas running the show in Gaza?

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Okay. I think if my next questioner can be very disciplined, we can get in one more. So Gary, I'm going to put that challenge to you.

MR. MITCHELL: This is a seven-part question.

I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write the Mitchell Report, and I would love to ask Ambassador Indyk if he could stretch his remarks about the extent to which Israel has built a stronger set of relationships around the world. Is that a function of seeing the U.S. as less important in its ability to develop relationships? And secondly, assuming that those relations --

MS. WITTES: I'm going to stop you at firstly.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. And does that enhance the prospects for Israel being successful in doing this with less American help?

MS. WITTES: Thank you. And the final question here, very briefly, please.

SPEAKER: I just heard a number of things that would not satisfy Hamas.

Quick question. What concession would satisfy Hamas?

MS. WITTES: Okay. Good. Thank you for that very short, sharp question.

Martin, maybe I'll start with you and the global politics here. There are contrary trends because Israel has developed relationships with other major powers, and yet, it's facing in the wake of this operation tremendous international censure as well. So, can you balance this out? And is it about, as Gary asked, American decline?

MR. INDYK: I don't think Gary used the word "decline."

MS. WITTES: Okay. I exaggerated.

MR. INDYK: I wouldn't use the word "decline." But I would use the word "withdrawal." And there is an American withdrawal under way from the Greater Middle East. We fought two very long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, each one decade -- more than a decade in Afghanistan. And the American public want to end those wars. And

that necessarily means that our posture, our dominance in the region is shifting -- want to end those wars. And that necessarily means that our posture, our dominance in the region is shifting. And when that happens, you know, when you have a dominant force that is in effect leaving militarily, although we've maintained a whole lot of positions -- I don't want to exaggerate this, but that is certainly the perception -- then the powers in the region are going to make their own calculations. And develop their own relationships. And adjust that. And that comes on top of the aftermath of the Arab revolutions and the way that that has caused a realignment. So you do see the aftermath of the Arab revolutions and the way that that has caused a realignment. So you do see in that broader context an alignment. It's not an alliance but it's an alignment of interests between the Sunni monarchies led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian authority, and Israel. And it's Iran, and it's Hezbollah, and it's Assad, and it's the Muslim Brotherhood, and it's Hamas. These are their common adversaries. And as they see that the United States is less engaged than it was before, it's natural that they look to each other quietly under the table in most respects, to find a way to help each other as it were. And I think that's the phenomena that's going on.

I do think it is not in Israel's interest, if I may suggest, for the United States to be seen as not being able to get concessions from Israel because of our strong support for Israel security. Because if they undermine their perception of their best friends -- and we are Israel's best friend -- if they undermine our ability to influence their adversaries or their belief of their adversaries and our ability to influence them, then they're going to face a much more difficult situation. Then they may find themselves comfortable in the embrace in the quiet, even silent embrace of their Arab neighbors. But as you referred to, they will find themselves more and more isolated in the international community that will not accept the continuation of the occupation for a very long time.

And so while I think a lot of this is natural, I think it's important that Israel be able to stand on its own two feet. I think the disrespect for the United States that has crept into the language of the right wing in Israel is a folly for Israel's best interests.

MS. WITTES: Okay, thank you.

Natan, I'm going to ask you to weigh in on that point Martin ended on in just a minute, but Khaled, you had a couple questions to you as well.

MR. SACHS: Yeah. I'll try to be brief.

On Gaza and Hamas, first of all, there isn't a Gazan people. There is a Palestinian people, part of which live in the Gaza Strip.

I think it's important to try to place yourself in the shoes of Palestinians in Gaza. They don't see Hamas as an alien organization committed to Israel's destruction and an evil terrorist organization with horns and tail and fangs. They don't see it as that. They see it as one of many Palestinian factions on the political landscape that espouses things, some of which they agree with, some of which they don't. The vast majority of Palestinians don't subscribe to Hamas's Islamist ideology. The vast majority of them do not even -- didn't vote for -- this is anecdotal. I don't have scientific evidence -- but even when Hamas won a majority, it wasn't because people bought into their ideology or rejected; it was simply because the other guys were failures. And it's simple. Whenever you have an election between one guy that fails and a new guy, you're going to vote for the new guy, even if you have questions about him. So that's just for starters.

Palestinians, you know, the other aspect of it, Hamas is not any different than Fatah was 30 years ago in almost every way. And I would actually argue that this goes to your question about what does Hamas want. What Hamas wants is an end to the occupation, which is what all Palestinians want. I don't believe that Hamas is throwing rockets at Israel because it is trying to destroy the state of Israel. Okay? If that

is their objective, then they're really on the long plan of Israel's destruction.

Their goal, and I don't mean to make light of it because obviously these are terrible things, but their objective primarily is to be taken seriously internationally, and to be relevant politically among Palestinians. They have said -- and Martin may disagree, other will certain disagree -- on a number of occasions, various Hamas leaders have said that they're willing to accept the Palestinian state in the 1967 borders with (inaudible) capital, and so on and so forth. The same formula that we accept minus recognition of Israel. Because in their view, recognition of Israel was offered by the PLO in exchange for nothing. Yasser Arafat recognized the PLO and still Palestinians -- recognized Israel but there is no Palestinian state. So recognition isn't what was missing. Recognition happened 25 years ago.

So there have been some lessons learned, but I believe that Hamas is not looking to create an Islamic caliphate from the river to the sea and then expand, but they actually want to end the Israeli occupation, and their resistance is seen in that context for Palestinians.

And even if we don't accept that, you make peace with your enemies and not with your friends. So you can't expect people to jump through all these hoops that you want them to and say, well, in order for you to qualify for a peace process with me, my enemy, your enemy, you have to do X, Y, and Z. That's just not -- that paradigm of conflict resolution does not exist anywhere in the world. You make peace with your enemies as they are, and then you hope that enemies don't remain enemies afterwards.

MS. WITTES: Although I would note that even for the United States, it took Arafat's 1988, 1989 declaration for the U.S. to be willing to open a dialogue with the PLO, and ultimately, that was incentive for him. Now, you say Palestinian politicians and factions have learned lessons from that, and I take that point. But it strikes me that the

Israel PLO mutual recognition of 1993 is the one thing from the Oslo process that has not been dismantled, rolled back, you know, from all of that experience. And therefore, it seems to have a pretty significant value to both sides. It changed the paradigm.

How do we understand Hamas's unwillingness to buy into that basic mutual recognition paradigm?

MR. ELGINDY: Because I think a lot of people are very critical now of Arafat's recognition that you recognize Israel's right to exist. You recognize a right in exchange for recognizing not a Palestinian right but a Palestinian reality which was the PLO is a representative of the Palestinian people. So it's not a one-for-one. Had it been a recognition of Israel's right to exist or self-determination, or whatever the phraseology would have been in exchange for a reciprocal right for Palestinian self-determination, that is the essence of a two-state solution. Then it would have been different. And so Hamas, as well as many others -- I've heard this from Fatah people who look very critically and say Arafat really was just establishing his and the PLO's relevance, that was the priority, as opposed to establishing a Palestinian right.

But let me quickly add one last point on this question of Hamas. Let's say we don't believe them. Let's say they're lying, underhanded, you know, deceiving individuals and we just don't trust them as a movement. That's what you would expect in a conflict setting. But the reality is that they have given these indications of a willingness to accept a two-state solution, and yet we have an Israeli government that includes members who openly oppose a two-state solution, who aren't coy about it, who aren't shy about it, and nobody says this is somehow an obstacle to peace or to a two-state solution. How we're going to negotiate a two-state solution with a government that doesn't believe in a two-state solution. I think there's a fundamental contradiction there. So it's not only one side that has extremists or that has, you know, but as I said, you



make peace with your enemies and not with your friends.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Thanks. Natan.

MR. SACHS: I'll refrain. But I'll say about the Israeli global perception of withdrawal. I think three things are true at the same time. First, there is a very strong perception Israel, as in other states in the region of a U.S. withdrawal, and it is sometimes exaggerated in the region, but it is a very strong perception and by now I think it's cemented. My perception of conversations with Israelis is that it is attributed very much to the administration, again, right or wrong, but it's very much that. It's not necessarily a perception of the U.S. as a complete withdrawal but of this administration, and I think there is a lot of questions about what might happen next, whoever becomes the next president, et cetera. It's unfortunate that so early in the second term there's already this kind of giving up in a sense. But giving up is limited. It's limited to this withdrawal. It's related in particular to the regional context that Israelis see. Israelis very much see this conflict in Gaza as, of course, its own thing but also a proxy for a regional - for several regional conflicts, particularly in this case between the traditional Sunni powers, plus Egypt in particular against the Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar, Turkey, et cetera, and Israelis very much see it in that regard and some of the comments that we saw, the extremely undiplomatic comments were sort of couched on that and they were popular in Israel partly because of that (inaudible) maybe the U.S. doesn't get this in some regard.

The Israeli relations across the world with Russia, with China, with India, each one is very different from the other, is longstanding. It starts even before this administration, the attempts for it, and I don't think they're necessarily (inaudible). When you speak to Israelis even given everything I just said, you will not find a serious Israeli in the elite who will not also say, "And of course, number one consideration is our most

important asset, and that is our extremely close alliance with the United States." They will all say it. The ministers and the bureaucrats, they will all say that.

I'll say one more thing and it's related to this. I think Israelis do underestimate the cost in public opinion even of this operation. They see leaders in the world who may be more privy to the diplomacy and cease fire negotiations and they see in Europe and certainly among the Arab world more support than they expected, but I don't think they appreciate just how bad the image was in public opinion worldwide. And more so, and this is to the point of the United States, even interesting results inside the United States, if you look at polling or you cross it by age, if you cross it by party, things are not as they were in the past. And from the Israeli or the Israeli-American relationship perspective, this is troubling if you support that.

MS. WITTES: Thank you.

Well, I want to thank all three of you for a frank exchange of views as we would say in the diplomacy business. And we look forward to reading what you will have coming out in the coming weeks. And I think we have also raised a lot of broader issues about the emerging landscape in the Arab world and in the Middle East that will set the context for this next phase of Arab Israeli relations, and I hope that you will join us for future events as we look into those dynamics. Thank you all for being here.

(Applause)

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